

## Experiences in southwestern Minnesota, 1859 to 1867 /

Lorin Cray

### **EXPERIENCES IN SOUTHWESTERN MINNESOTA, 1859 TO 1867.\***

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I am neither one of the very early pioneers of Minnesota, nor yet a historian. In early life my horizon was very narrow. Yet I saw and experienced a few of the realities of frontier life, of which some of you saw and experienced many.

Recounting events which have occurred in our immediate neighborhood is to us the most interesting of all history. We are familiar with localities, and are much more impressed with the facts. Our imagination helps us to see the Indian canoe on our rivers and lakes, and the tepee upon the banks; and later, our memory recalls the log cabins and rude surroundings of the pioneers, followed still later by beautiful farms and bright cities and villages.

The lives and experiences of some of the early settlers of Minnesota are household words in this state, but of the history and experiences of many others little is known, and what is being handed down is passed along by just such gatherings as we have here.

In the early spring of 1859 my father and brother-in-law started with teams of oxen and covered wagons from our home near Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to seek a location in the West, where homes could be gotten without money and without price. It was not definitely determined where they would go, but it was to be somewhere in the great new state of Minnesota, to us an unknown region.

Pioneer emigration by the then only method known to us, the covered wagon drawn by oxen, was quite brisk that year, and inquiry made by father of explorers returning for their families, influenced them to go to the western part of Blue Earth county.

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In October of the same year all the earthly belongings of my father, being my mother, seven children, and a handful of household goods, were loaded into a wagon drawn by a pair of unbroken steers, and we were ready to start for our new home. The two cows which we had were to be driven behind the wagon. My elder brother drove the steers attached to the wagon, and we, the younger children, drove the cows. In the short period of precisely thirty days we reached our new home near the southwestern corner of Blue Earth county. Now we make the trip in twelve hours.

The year had been a peculiar one in Wisconsin. There had been severe frost at some time in every month during the entire summer. Corn and other produce was badly frostbitten, and by October first all vegetation was brown and dead.

But there had been much rain in Minnesota, evidently preventing frosts; and when we crossed the great "Father of Waters" at La Crosse, much swollen and turbid, we were greeted by green foliage, and the freshness of spring. Vegetation was rank, grass tender, crops good, foliage magnificent; and, boy-like, I at once fell in love with Minnesota. At that time the southern part of Waseca and Blue Earth counties was almost wholly uncultivated, producing a wonderful growth of wild grasses.

We crossed the Blue Earth river about thirty miles north of the Iowa line, and it then seemed that we had reached the very limit of civilization. One could look from the river west, southwest, and northwest, and except a few settlers' cabins near the river, not a sign of human life or habitation could be seen. In fact, the western part of Blue Earth, Faribault and Brown counties, and all of Martin, Jackson, Watonwan, Cottonwood, Rock, Nobles, Murray, and Pipestone, Redwood, Lyon and Lincoln counties, were entirely unsettled,

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save for a few settlers along the Minnesota, Blue Earth, Watonwan, Des Moines and Rock rivers, and around the Chain lakes and lake Shetck.

Our first impression was that we were entirely without neighbors. The nearest settlers were a mile distant, and there were only four or five families nearer than four miles away. But we soon learned that we had neighbors, even though the distance was considerable.

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First one neighbor and then another would extend to every family in the vicinity an invitation to spend an afternoon or an evening. Someone would hitch his oxen to his wagon or sled, and, going from house to house, gather up a full load, and then, at the usual gait for such conveyances, we rode and visited until we reached the appointed place, where perhaps eight, ten or a dozen persons spent the afternoon or evening in the one little room where the meal was being prepared and the table spread. In this way many warm friendships were formed, never to be broken. Such neighbors are, as a rule, neighbors in fact, as well as in name.

A man was asked, "Why did you return to the west, after having gone back to New York, and having spent two years there?" His answer was, "Neighbors! Would you want to spend your life where the people twenty feet away do not know your name, or care whether you live or die? We used to have neighbors in the west, but when our baby died in New York not a person came near us, and we went to the cemetery alone. We thought we would come back home."

How very many have had nearly the same experience! On the frontier a settler becomes ill, and his grain is sown, other crops are planted, and the harvest is gathered. A widow buries her husband, and her experience is the same. Why is this? Because they have neighbors. It is no light thing for one to leave his harvest and go miles to save the crop of another, but it has been done times without number; and the neighborly sentiment,

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which prompts such kindly acts, counts for something in making up the sum total of human happiness in this short life of ours.

What did we have to eat that year? Potatoes and corn, no flour, no meat, some milk. I doubt whether there was a barrel of flour within three miles of our home. No wheat had been raised, no hogs had been fattened; corn and potatoes were the only food.

In 1859, 1860, and 1861, the Blue Earth valley was supplied with mail by a weekly stage route from Mankato to Garden City, Vernon, Shelbyville, Winnebago, and Blue Earth City. The post office for our country for miles around was Shelbyville, 438 then quite a promising village about two miles south of the present village of Amboy.

We were five miles from Shelbyville, and to get our mail we must go this distance and cross the Blue Earth river, either in a canoe or by fording. I remember one occasion in the very early spring, when the river was scarcely free from ice and was much swollen, filling its banks. Five or six of us, neighbors, started for Shelbyville to get our mail, and to hear the postmaster read the news from a weekly St. Paul paper which came to him, there being at that time, I think, no newspaper taken west of the river. We reached the river, the ice had gone out, and the canoe was on the other side. We agreed to draw cuts and decide who should swim the river and get the canoe. The lot fell upon Jonah, and I have had chills ever since. I am not quite certain that the cuts were fairly held. Shelbyville is dead, very dead, and it is deserving of a parting tear.

The first religious service in our neighborhood was conducted in a little log school house near our home in the early summer of 1860, and was attended by very nearly the entire settlement. The men were nearly all in bare feet; the women were dressed in drills and denims; the children were compelled to stand for want of seats.

In the autumn of 1860 large flocks of blackbirds, such as I think were never since seen in this country, attacked the corn crops and destroyed much corn. This was general over all southwestern Minnesota. It is no exaggeration whatever, when I say that dense flocks

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would consume an entire day and even longer in flying over a given point. The state offered forty cents per hundred for their heads, many were poisoned, but apparently no benefit was accomplished.

The same year sandhill cranes were so numerous, voracious, and bold, that they could scarcely be driven from the fields.

The following spring of 1861, the water in the Blue Earth river rose twenty-six feet in forty-eight hours, breaking the record, I believe, for that eccentric stream, flooding the bottoms, floating away much wood and fencing material gotten out by the farmers, and drowning several persons. One family living on the bottomland, whose shanty was surrounded by water in the night, lost several children.

Soon came the War of the Rebellion. My older brother at once returned to Wisconsin and enlisted in the Third Wisconsin Volunteers.

In 1861 a state war tax of one dollar for each legal voter was levied. My father was a voter. It was not a very heavy emergency tax, to be sure, but my brother-in-law and myself worked an entire day and late into the night, with two teams of oxen, cutting a large saw log and hauling it to the mill at Shelbyville, which log we sold for a dollar in order to pay this tax.

I enlisted on August 17, 1862, and on August 18 the Sioux Indian troubles began. There were no railroads, telegraph or telephone lines, but one stage line, and I could never understand how the reports of these troubles spread as rapidly as they did. Although the massacre began about sixty miles from us, yet on the 19th of August our whole country had reasonably reliable information of the uprising. A neighbor came to our house in the night, neighbor went to neighbor, and so the news travelled. The men were in a fury of excitement and anxiety; the women and children were quaking with fear.

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Wagons were hastily loaded with women and children and a little food, animals were turned loose to provide themselves with food, houses were left unlocked, oxen were hitched to the wagons, and a general stampede was started toward the east, with all eyes turned toward the west. No one knew whither they were going; they only knew that they dare not stay.

A halt was made at Shelbyville, the strongest buildings were selected for occupancy, the women and children were placed inside, and the men acted as pickets. In the whole country there were scarcely a dozen guns.

Reports came worse and worse. New Ulm, twenty-five miles away, was attacked, and another stampede began for the east; some stopped at Wilton, Owatonna, and Rochester, and some, so far as was ever heard, are going yet. After waiting two or three weeks and hearing encouraging reports, some of the more venturesome returned to their homes with their families, only to remain a few days, and were again driven away 440 by the near proximity of the Indians and the sickening reports of their murders. What was true of our neighborhood was true of every settlement in all southwestern Minnesota.

When the stampede from our neighborhood started, my father drove our oxen with my mother and five children in the wagon. On reaching the Blue Earth river about four miles away, one of the oxen was taken sick, and could be driven no farther; he lay down and died. Here was a somewhat unpleasant dilemma, but a swarthy young man in the caravan went into the woods and, as he put it, "fiscated" a young unbroken steer, put him into the yoke, and make him work. When they returned several weeks afterward, the steer was turned loose where he was found, and we have not yet ascertained whose property he was.

The unsettled and terrifying conditions then existing continued until late in the fall, when, under the general belief that the Indians would not move on the war path in the winter, the greater number of the settlers returned to their homes to save what they could of their

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nearly destroyed and wasted crops. Some of them, indeed quite many, never returned. With feelings of partial security, and encouraged by their escape from slaughter thus far, the settlers remained at their homes, under an intense strain of anxiety but nearly undisturbed, until 1864, when rumors of Indian troubles were again heard; but the settlers were not so easily terrified as before, and held their ground.

Many a day during this time my younger brothers and sisters sat upon the roof of our straw-covered cattle shed and watched for Indians, while father worked in the field. Little wonder, if some of the children of pioneer days became prematurely old and thoughtful.

On the 11th day of August, 1864, after quite a long period of freedom from Indian disturbances, a party of eight or ten Indians suddenly appeared in the edge of the timber on the east side of the Blue Earth river, between Shelbyville and Vernon, and, taking wholly by surprise Mr. Noble G. Root and his two sons, who were stacking grain, shot and killed Mr. Root and seriously wounded one, and, as I think, both of his sons.

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The Indians then crossed the river in a westerly direction, reaching the open country where the Willow Creek cemetery now is. On that day, Mr. Charles Mack of Willow Creek, with his team and mower, had gone to the farm of Mr. Hindman, a near neighbor of ours a short distance from Willow Creek to mow hay for Mr. Hindman, who in exchange had gone to the farm of Mr. Mack to assist Mr. Jesse Mack in stacking grain. They were loading grain directly across the road from the cemetery, when, on looking toward the road, but a few rods away, they saw these Indians coming directly toward them. They both hastily got upon the load, and Mr. Mack whipped his horses into a run, when, in crossing a dead furrow, Mr. Hindman was thrown from the load, pitchfork in hand, striking upon his face in the stubble and dirt. Rubbing the dirt from his eyes as best he could, he started to run, and as soon as he was able to open his eyes and see, he discovered that he was running directly toward the Indians. He reversed the engine somewhat suddenly, put on a little

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more steam, and made splendid time in the other direction toward the creek bed, less than a quarter of a mile away.

Once in the creek, the water in which was very low at that time, he followed the bed of the creek for nearly a quarter of a mile, and then stopped to rest and to wash the dirt and blood from his face. He then left the stream and started up the bluff on the opposite side, which was quite steep and covered thickly with timber and brush. Nearly at the top of the bluff he came to a little opening in the brush, and looking around about a hundred feet, he saw those Indians deliberately watching his approach. Utterly exhausted and unnerved, he dared not run; he paused, and in a moment one of the Indians drew a large knife and started directly toward him. Concluding that his day of reckoning had come, he took the position of a soldier with his pitchfork at "change bayonets" and awaited the approach of the Indian, who came within a very few feet of him and stopped. Each stood, looked, and waited for the other to open the meeting; finally the Indian turned as if to retreat, and Mr. Hindman turned again toward the creek. He reached it. There was no official time-keeper, and the exact time is 442 not recorded. He then followed the creek bed down to the house of Mr. Mack, where he found a pony belonging to himself, which he had ridden there that morning, and started with all speed toward his own home, where he arrived just before dark.

His children were gone, his house ransacked, nearly every thing broken or destroyed, and in the meadow a short distance from the house was the dead body of Mr. Charles Mack. By this time darkness had set in. His wife had gone that day about two miles to the house of Mr. Jesse Thomas to attend a neighborhood quilting. He again mounted his pony and started across the prairie for that place. When about half the distance had been made, the pony looked sharply to one side and neighed loudly. Mr. Hindman looked through the semi-darkness in the direction indicated, and there, about two or three hundred feet away, were the Indians; four of them were mounted, the others on foot. Mr. Hindman put whip and spur to his pony and ran him for nearly a mile, then he stopped in a valley to listen for



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the Indians; he did not hear them, and he has always insisted that he has never seen them since.

On arriving at the home of Jesse Thomas he found it deserted, ransacked, and nearly everything destroyed.

It was later learned that his children saw the Indians attack Mr. Mack, that they ran from the house and secreted themselves in the very tall grass of the slough in which Mr. Mack was mowing, and escaped with their lives.

The ladies at the quilting had a visit from the Indians; they saw them approaching from a belt of timber but a few rods away, and, escaping by a back door to the cornfield which came quite up to the house, all their lives were saved.

No more honest, kindhearted and generous neighbors ever gave their lives in defense of their property and their families, than were Charles Mack and Noble G. Root.

I need not dwell upon the furor of alarm which this Indian raid again caused in that settlement, and indeed all over southwestern Minnesota. Many settlers again seriously contemplated finally abandoning their homes and property and fleeing for their lives; they had nearly lost all faith in the assurances of protection by the public authorities. But squads of armed men were organized, the country was scoured, pickets were put out, the women and children were corralled as well as possible, and after a while confidence was again partially restored.

This was the last Indian raid into southwestern Minnesota, save the raid into Blue Earth county on the 2nd day of May, 1865, in which the Jewett family in Rapidan were murdered, with the circumstances of which all are familiar.

It has been written that the half-breed Campbell, who was hanged in Mankato for participation in this murder, "was captured by an armed citizen by the name of Dodge,

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and taken to Mankato.” This is not correct. This man Dodge, whom I well knew, and who signed for enlistment in my company, was walking along a public road near Jones' Ford, going toward Mankato about three miles away, when he fell in with Campbell going in the same direction. Nothing was said or done in the way of a capture, but Campbell's actions and talk were such as to create suspicion that he knew of the killing of the Jewett family. On arriving at Mankato, Dodge related his experience and suspicions, and Campbell was then taken into custody. Campbell was on his way to Kasota at the time, where his mother then lived. He was tried a few days after this murder on the Court House lawn in Mankato, by a sort of drumhead court-martial, and then and there was executed by being hanged to a tree.

William J. Jewett, who was a baby in arms when this family was murdered, and who was struck upon the head and left for dead, but who of the entire family survived, was this last summer killed in an automobile accident in the suburbs of Mankato.

I have said that I enlisted on August 17, 1862. We were mustered on the 19th and assigned as Company the of the Ninth Minnesota, but we did not meet the other companies of our regiment for more than a year thereafter. On the every day of our muster we learned of the Indian outbreak at the Lower Agency, and our company was ordered to march at once to St. Peter.

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Company D was made up very largely of farmer boys right from the harvest fields, dressed in denims and straw hats, some in bare feet, and we were not in first class marching order, nor very presentable. Uniforms and Government clothing could not be had, and, more than this, the only arms with which we could then be furnished were old Austrian and Belgian muskets, which had been stored and poorly cared for since the war of 1812. Very many of the muskets were utterly useless as firearms.

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Notwithstanding these little deficiencies in our make-up, we made a forced march to St. Peter, looking more like a squad of Missouri bushwackers than Union soldiers. On our arrival at St. Peter we at once dug a line of rifle pits along the crown of the bluffs, extending from the present location of the Insane Hospital on the south to the Minnesota river on the north; and we spent the fall and winter in drilling, picketing in the rifle pits, and scouting the country toward New Ulm and Fort Ridgely and in the vicinity of Swan lake. I well remember that there were brought into St. Peter a woman and children who had been found hiding in the tall grass and rushes near their house which was yet burning, the husband and father having been killed.

After the second battle at New Ulm, and when that city was evacuated, there came over the hill on the New Ulm road and into St. Peter, very early one morning, a very large number of men, women and children, with horse teams, or oxen, on horseback and on foot, a veritable mob or rabble which had been on the road all night coming from New Ulm to St. Peter, in imminent peril of their lives. Two large stone warehouses stood on the river front at St. Peter, and these were hastily converted into barracks and what we then called "soup houses" for these refugees, where they remained a long time. We so called these quarters because for want of sufficient rations, on which to feed these people, they were fed largely on soup made in great kettles as the cheapest food and that which would make the food supply go farthest. The old Court House, a frame building not far from the Episcopal church, was converted into a hospital for the sick and wounded, of which there 445 were many, the patients lying upon the floors for want of beds or cots.

We were diligently and persistently drilled in military maneuvers through the entire winter, and became quite proficient. While as a steady diet we did not enjoy these drills, there were some amusing experiences. A company of German cavalry was there, and their orders on drill were given in German. Our infantry company and the German cavalry company would frequently have a sham battle. The infantry would advance, deploy as skirmishers, and the cavalry would charge us with their horses on the run. The infantry

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would rally on the center, and, as the cavalry came near, fire with blank cartridges; then the horses would throw their riders and run away. This was too strenuous work for the cavalry and we discontinued it. The hospital was fast filling with injured cavalry men, and the horses were not at all schooled to their work by this manner of drill.

A little incident illustrates the freight problem then and now. I was at a ford on the Minnesota river. A man came along with a team of oxen and a wagon loaded with cook stoves. He crossed the river and in going up a sharp hill the chain broke, the wagon ran back, tipped over upon the stones, and every stove was broken. The man was about ready to have a nervous collapse. He said that he had gone from Mankato to St. Paul for this load of stoves for a Mankato dealer, had been on the road two weeks, that he was perfectly willing to lose his time and expenses, and to ask no compensation, but that if he should be required to pay for the stoves, it would take all the property he had on earth. I hope that he was not required to pay for the stoves.

While at St. Peter, in the early part of December, 1862, a few of us learned, by grapevine telegraph, late one afternoon, that an effort was to be made the following evening by the citizens of Mankato, New Ulm, and vicinity, to kill the Indian prisoners, three hundred and more, then in camp at Mankato near the present site of Sibley Park. As no admission fee was to be charged, the select few determined to attend the entertainment. After dark we corrupted a wagon-master, secured 446 a team of Government mules and a wagon, and started for Mankato, where we arrived about nine o'clock in the evening. I have never seen a correct history of this fiasco in print.

The headquarters of the blood-thirsty citizens was the old Mankato House, located where the National Citizens' Bank now stands, and liquid refreshments were being served liberally, without money and without price. A very large crowd had gathered, but there seemed to be no great haste to march on the Indian camp. Several times a start was made by a squad of fifty or a hundred persons, who would proceed for a few hundred feet and then halt, finally returning for more refreshments.

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Nearly at midnight the supply of refreshments must have become exhausted, for the army moved. Several hundred of the citizens started south along Front Street for the Indian camp, straggling along a distance of several blocks. When the head of the column reached West Mankato, it halted until the rear camp up, and while a rambling discussion was going on as to just what they should do, and how they should do it, Captain (since Governor) Austin and his company of cavalry surrounded the whole squad and ordered them to move on toward Colonel (since Governor) Miller's headquarters, right at the Indian camp, where now they seemed reluctant to go and refused to move.

Captain Austin ordered his men to close in, which they did, crowding the citizens, and yet they refused to move. Finally he gave the command "Draw sabers," and when a hundred sabers came out in one movement, the army again moved on Colonel Miller's headquarters at the Indian camp.

The scene there was supremely ridiculous. Colonel Miller came out from his tent and spoke kindly to the citizens, and asked why they had congregated in such large numbers. Every one who answered at all insisted that their mission was wholly peaceful, being utterly ignorant of any evil designs, and finally the Colonel ordered their release and suggested that they go home, which they hastened to do.

The next morning these Indians were removed, under guard of all the troops in the city, to log barracks which had been 447 built for them on Front street, diagonally across the street from where the Saulpaugh Hotel now stands. The removal was accomplished without incident, except that occasionally an epithet was hurled at the soldiers for being engaged in guarding and protecting the Indians.

These barracks were occupied by the Indians only about two weeks. They had been there little more than a week, when the officer of the day, making his morning inspection, which was very formal, thought that he saw a hatchet or a knife under the blanket of one of the Indians. Without a change of countenance or a suspicious movement he proceeded in

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the inspection until it was completed, retired from the barracks, and at once caused to be quietly mustered around the barracks every soldier in the city with loaded guns and fixed bayonets. Then with a squad of soldiers he entered the barracks, and searching every Indian, secured a large number of hatchets, knives, clubs, and other weapons. These weapons, it was learned, had been gotten at the Winnebago Agency, about twelve miles from Mankato, by several squaws who prepared food for these Indians, and who were allowed to go to the woods to gather fuel for their fires.

Immediately after this discovery the Indians who were under sentence of death were removed to a stone building but a few feet distant, where they were kept under heavy guard. The guard which had been kept around the barracks had been comparatively light, and had the Indians moved in the night time before their plans were discovered, they would probably have escaped.

A few days after this incident, my company came from St. Peter to Mankato on December 26, 1862, to act as a guard on one side of the scaffold at the execution of the thirty-eight Indians who were then hanged, about one hundred and fifty feet northerly from the location of the Saulpaugh Hotel, and between Front street and the river, of which execution so much has been written and said.

In the very early spring of 1863 my company was ordered from St. Peter to Judson on the southwest side of the Minnesota river, very near where Judson station now is, about midway 448 way between Mankato and New Ulm. There we built a sod fort about 150 feet square and about ten feet high, making an excellent fort for resisting Indian attacks, and we there remained until May of that year, scouting the prairies and timber lands, and bearing dispatches between New Ulm, St. Peter, South Bend, and Mankato. The remains of the fort can still be seen, and an engineer's draft of its is in the files of this Historical Society.

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While in this fort I was on one occasion ordered to go to the stables, saddle the fleetest mule, and carry certain important dispatches to Mankato. Riding mules was not my long suit, but I obeyed. I had proceeded about two miles, when I came to a narrow bridge which my mule refused to cross. We fought it out and the mule conquered. I succeeded in getting him so unmanagable that he turned and ran back to Judson with me, in spite of all that I could do. I was so mortified that, rather than go to the fort, I let him go direct to the stables, where I dismounted and secured a driver's "black snake." Remounting, I applied it so vigorously that when we reached the bridge the second time, neither of us knew it. I was complimented for making such excellent time.

In early May, 1863, one platoon of our company was ordered to Fairmont in Martin county, and the other platoon to a small prairie lake in the same county, then called Chanyaska lake, about eleven miles northwest from Fairmont and a short distance north of Elm creek.

I was with the platoon under Captain Skaro, which was ordered to Fairmont. We marched from Judson by the way of Garden City, Vernon Center, and Shelbyville to Winnebago City, and from there we marched across the prairie as nearly in a direct line as possible to Fairmont. If there were any roads, we did not see them; our course the whole distance was through prairie grass.

We approached Fairmont from a northeasterly direction. Halting on a hill or elevation a short distance from there, we caught the first sight of our destination. From this standpoint the landscape was most beautiful and attractive.

To the east from whence we came could be seen a sea of rolling prairie, with the timber on the Blue Earth river eighteen or twenty miles away, and extending from the Blue Earth county line southerly to Blue Earth City and beyond. To the south our vision extended across the prairies to the Iowa line, with the timber of East Chain lakes as the only obstruction to our view. To the north was Elm creek, which could be traced by the skirting trees from a distance west of the Central Chain lakes in an easterly direction to the

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Blue Earth river, with the mounds in Blue Earth county, near which I lived, plainly visible beyond the valley of Elm creek, twenty miles away. To the west, as placid as molten silver, were seen the waters of two of the Central Chain lakes, and the timber skirting two or three more, beyond which was an endless sea of rolling prairie.

Immediately in our front, sleepy and quiet, was the little log fort which we were to occupy. The few little homes upon the takes then occupied, were hidden in the woods, and the little fort was the only visible evidence of the handiwork of man.

The fort was located just southerly from the present beautiful Court House, the westerly wall running about parallel with the high bluff of the lake shore, and about fifty feet from where the bluff begins to descend toward the lake. It was constructed of large, long logs, and was about eight feet high and a hundred and fifty feet square; it enclosed the first Martin county court house, which was used by us as a mess room. This Court House was about 18 by 24 feet, built of boards, one story high, and is there yet, just to the south of the Court House grounds, and should be preserved.

This fort had just been vacated by a company of Wisconsin cavalry in anticipation of our arrival. A draft of this fort made by government engineers is now in the files of this Society.

We found on investigation that we had inherited from the cavalry company two canoes and a small flat boat, which were lying at what is now the boat landing on Sisseton lake. These boats furnished us with very much amusement. It was a favorite pastime to engage in naval battles, the two canoes against the flat boat, and more than once I found myself and canoe tipped over in the middle of the lake, my paddle captured, and I left to get ashore as best I could. 29

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The platoon ordered to Chanyaska lake, under command of Lieutenant Patton, arrived there about the time that we reached Fairmont. This was a shallow prairie lake, with heavy marsh grass all around it, and was literally alive with geese, brant, and ducks, and quite



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frequently large swans could be seen upon its waters. This platoon constructed a sod fort near the shore of the lake much like the fort we had built at Judson.

About once in each month our platoons changed locations, so that each platoon was in each fort about an equal length of time. Our duties consisted of scouting the prairies to the west of us for Indians, but not one was seen by us that summer.

A line of forts was constructed and occupied that summer, extending from the Iowa boundary northerly to Fort Abercrombie, and cavalry scouts frequently passed along this line, carrying our mails, and keeping us posted as to Indian disturbances.

Captain McLeod, General Sibley's chief of scouts, a very congenial man, frequently visited us.

We had a few good musicians in our company and we determined to have a celebration at Fairmont on July fourth, and a dance in the evening. We invited our friends and relatives all along the line from Blue Earth City to St. Peter, and I think that about every one came. Our barracks, which we surrendered to the ladies, were filled to overflowing. We soldiers slept upon the stable roofs, the ground, in our boats, everywhere and anywhere; but, because of the mosquitoes, the most of us slept nowhere. The platoon from Chanyaska came over and we had a royal time, rounded out with an all-night dance.

The day before the 4th, six of us went out on lake Sisseton and lake George with our three boats and killed thirty-six geese; another detail of men caught fish in abundance; and on the fourth our meals were mostly fish and goose, goose and fish, boiled, fried, baked, stewed, and broiled.

The unusual movement of Indians and troops on the western plains that summer seemed to disturb and break up the usually large herds of buffaloes which roamed there, dividing 451 them into smaller herds which wandered in many directions. On two occasions in the early morning our pickets discovered buffaloes across Sisseton lake to the west of us,

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on one occasion two, and on another three. We immediately organized hunting parties, succeeded in killing all of them, and enjoyed the novelty of buffalo steak very much.

We had one horse which belonged to one of our officers, and on one of these occasions there was a peddler at our fort who drove an old and somewhat crippled horse. These horses were both taken by the soldiers on the buffalo hunt. The man riding the peddler's horse approached quite near a buffalo after we had surrounded him, and fired, wounding the buffalo, which quickly lowered his head and charged directly at him. It was with the greatest effort that this man succeeded in getting the machinery of that horse in motion quick enough to escape being caught; both man and horse then and there retired from the field.

We succeeded, at both of our forts, in catching alive foxes, prairie chickens, quails, cranes, geese, and an endless variety of ducks, making really an interesting collection, which we kept in cages and pens, cared for and fed, until we turned them over to our successors. We also had a tame hawk at each fort, wings entirely uncut, at liberty to come and go as they would, but they were the most tame of any of our collection, and came long distances to answer the bugle call for meals.

At our fort at Fairmont we learned a lesson in order which I think none of us have ever quite forgotten. One dark night after midnight the drum sounded the long roll, which means "An attack, get into line quick!" Things had been going smooth, and we had gotten extremely careless in the location of our clothing on retiring to bed, and such confusion as this call caused can hardly be imagined. I jumped from the upper bunk which I occupied, and fell straddle of the neck of an occupant of the lower bunk, who was trying to get on one of my shoes; the other one I could not find. In fifteen minutes from the first tap of the drum we were in line, some without shoes, some without hats, several without guns, nearly all in a partial state of undress, only to receive a well deserved scolding for our utter disorder.

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After two more similar experiments, we could, in utter darkness, get into line of battle, fully equipped, in three minutes from the first tap of the drum. I am still inclined to practice the lesson I then learned.

About the first of October we were relieved by a company of Minnesota cavalry, and were ordered to join our regiment at Fort Snelling and go south.

On the 8th day of October, 1863, there stood upon the hurricane deck of a steamer gently steaming down the Mississippi river past Lake City, where the present generation of soldier boys are wont to camp, and toward the Sunny Southland then grim with the smoke of battle, eight healthy, cheerful and light-hearted soldier boys, discussing the question whether we, and how many of us, would ever see Fairmont again.

One lies buried at Benton Barracks, Missouri; one sleeps in the Soldiers' Cemetery at Memphis, with seventy-two thousand loyal comrades; five went to a soldier's death under the scorching sun, within the prison stockade at Andersonville. I alone, of all these, was privileged to look again upon Fairmont and those beautiful lakes.

About the time of the close of the war, immigration became brisk, many new settlers came into southwestern Minnesota, and signs of thrift and prosperity were for the first time manifest in all directions. In the years 1866 and 1867 there was a veritable farmers' boom throughout all the country; much new land was broken and much building done. All of the grain crop seemed to be needed for bread, seed, and feed for the newcomers. There was no occasion to haul produce to market. It was all eagerly taken at the farm.

There was in 1866 a splendid crop of everything. Wheat sold at the farm in the spring of 1867 at \$2.00 to \$3.00 per bushel; oats at 50 to 75 cents; potatoes at \$1.00 and upward, and everything else accordingly. This caused a great increase in acreage of producing ground, which was increased manyfold. Some said that wheat would never go below \$2.00 again.

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How about the result of all this? The crop of 1867 was a very bountiful one. Farmers were compelled to pay from \$3.00 to \$3.50 per day each for six or seven harvest hands to follow 453 the old hand rake or self rake reapers, and the wheat crop sold at 35 to 55 cents per bushel. Debts had been created for new machinery at high prices and high rates of interest. Low prices of produce prevailed for many years, and the result was an extended period of great depression and very hard times. Many farms were lost under mortgages, and many of the early settlers were compelled to go elsewhere and start again.

A true pioneer is very seldom fitted to compete with the more shrewd and experienced man of the world. He is as a rule quite unable to reason from cause to effect, or to foresee approaching conditions and profit thereby. He is quite incompetent to deal with the average business man at arm's length, and the result is inevitably "the survival of the fittest," as has been very heartlessly said. He suffers hardship and privation, sometimes starvation and death, to open and develop some garden spot on this earth, only to be crowded out by his more shrewd successor, who lives to enjoy the fruits of his toil.

In this day and age of great and rapid transitions, of industrial and commercial war, wonderful inventions and intense life, when the industrial, commercial and social world is going at such a furious pace, let us not forget that the pioneers of all this country, both east and west, made all this possible; yes indeed, made this country. They are the people who made this great state, and who are entitled to the credit for pretty nearly all that is good and worthy in it.

They came in the days when men across the great river hitched oxen to covered wagons, and with their families and household goods drove over corduroy roads, through sloughs and sand, through forests and over prairies, across half a continent to the frontier beyond. Mere girls and boys driving teams and following cows, as joyous as if life was one long holiday; tired women, gazing from under the canvas tops, wondering whither bound;

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children as ruddy as cherries, first riding and then running alongside,—all were chasing the setting sun.

Stories of trampling of fighters on the march and in the clash of arms, there are in plenty, surrounded by all the romance and glamour of which poets love to sing; but because 454 these heroes and heroines of pioneer days went forth from our own borders, because they shed a martyr's blood without a martyr's prayer or a martyr's whine, because, when they won the game of life's battle, they were dust grimed, ragged victors, because they were heroes and heroines of the commonplace, their history is largely unwritten.

It is easier to be a hero of the regiment, marching in uniform and pomp to the music of the trombone and tuba, than a hero of the spade and the axe, the milk-pail and the frying-pan. Yet the conquest of the frontier was wrought by the heroes and heroines of the homespun, by the men and women, too, with rifle in one hand, and the implements of toil in the other.

Of no class is this more true than of the early settlers of southwestern Minnesota, men and women with muscles of iron and nerves of steel.

“He is swart from the glow of the merciless sun, And his muscles are sore from the work he has done; He has builded his home where the prairie wolves roam; He's the hewer, the blazer of trails.

He is crude with the strength of the seeker of toil, From the hot barren wastes he is gathering spoil, For a nation that lives from the bounty he gives; He's the builder, the winner of ways.

Where the silent wastes bake in the summer's hot glow, Where the forests are choked in the shroud of the snow, By his brain and his brawn a new nation is born; He goes forward to conquer new realms.

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And the world has its heroes of lace and gold braid, That are honored and wined for the  
waste they have made; But the world little knows of the debt that it owes To the hewer, the  
blazer of trails."